



**USAID**  
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

# AFGHANISTAN

## Health

Fall 2009



Photo: USAID/Afghanistan

*A doctor vaccinates an Afghan woman. More than 750,000 patients receive services monthly from USAID-funded health facilities or USAID-trained healthcare providers.*

### HEALTH SNAPSHOT

- More than 8.5 million people have improved access to basic health services in 13 USAID-supported provinces
- 26 percent drop in child mortality since 2002.
- More than 670 health facilities constructed or renovated.
- More than 17,000 health workers trained, including pre-service training for midwives and community health workers and in-service training for doctors, midwives, nurses, and lab technicians.
- More than 30,000 people received health care services daily through clinics and direct outreach workers.
- More than seven million children vaccinated against polio.

### BACKGROUND

Afghanistan has one of the highest mortality rates in the world: one in five children dies before the age of five and one out of every eight Afghan women die from causes related to pregnancy and childbirth each year. Life expectancy is only 44 years for both men and women. While these statistics are tragic, there has been progress. Recent reports indicate that 85 percent of the population has access to basic health services within one hour of travel to any health facility (68 percent for those on foot) – up from nine percent in 2002. Infant mortality decreased by 22 percent and child mortality dropped 26 percent since 2002.

### PROGRAM OVERVIEW

USAID has adopted a three-pronged approach to improving the health of the Afghan people. USAID's health programs help meet the immediate health care needs of the population by strengthening the health care service delivery system; addressing the management leadership and stewardship capacity of the Afghan health care system at the central, provincial, district, and community levels; and increasing demand for and access to quality health products and services through the private sector – 60 percent of the population receive health care from the private sector.

### MEETING IMMEDIATE HEALTH CARE NEEDS

Working closely with the Ministry of Public Health, USAID provides essential health services and pharmaceutical assistance to 13 million people in 13 provinces through the Basic Package of Health Services (BPHS) and the Essential Package of Hospital Services (EPHS). A majority of those seeking health services are women and children under the age of five years. More than 750,000 patients (70 percent of which are women and children) receive services each month from USAID-supported health facilities. The World Bank, the European Community, and other donors support these services in the remaining 21 provinces.

Afghanistan and Pakistan are two of four remaining countries in the world with live polio virus. Insecurity along the border, especially in the south, has led to a lack of health workers and an increase in polio cases from seven in 2004 to 24 to date in 2009. USAID supports the national Polio Eradication Initiative to strengthen Afghanistan's immunization communication, service delivery, and surveillance networks. As a result of USAID assistance, more than seven million Afghan children, or 90 percent of children under the age of five, have been vaccinated against polio.

USAID also supports tuberculosis (TB) detection, treatment, and control efforts in 13 target provinces using the Directly Observed Therapy, Short Course (DOTS) methodology. Globally recognized as the best way to cure TB and control its spread, DOTS is a six to eight month program in which health providers directly administer medication and closely monitor patient progress. USAID also provides assistance to upgrade TB laboratory services nationwide and supports the Global Fund agenda.

Data as of November 2009

U.S. Agency for International Development  
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## Health (continued)



Photo: USAID/Afghanistan

*Professional midwives graduate. During Taliban rule, the practice of midwifery was banned. USAID has provided training to more than 17,000 health workers including midwives, doctors, nurses, and lab technicians.*



Photo: USAID/Afghanistan

*A lab technician in Touraghondi, Hirat provides lab results for patients. USAID has built or renovated over 670 health facilities across the country.*

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### BUILDING CAPACITY IN THE HEALTH SYSTEM

USAID supports the Ministry of Public Health to improve its capacity to plan and manage activities, allocate resources, increase human capacity, strengthen the health information system, and monitor and evaluate the BPHS and EPHS programs. USAID's technical assistance to the Ministry has resulted in its ability to receive a USAID grant for implementation of health services in 13 provinces – the first Afghan Government entity to receive direct significant funding from the U.S. Government.

USAID supports approximately 48 percent of all volunteer community health workers currently practicing in Afghanistan. Collectively, these community health workers see about 45 percent of all sick children visiting health workers – the remainder receives services at health facilities. USAID also supports in-service training for physicians, nurses, and midwives.

Increasing access to skilled birth attendants is essential to improving maternal and child health in the country. USAID currently funds and provides technical support to seven community midwifery programs and two facility-based midwifery education programs. To date, 593 midwives have graduated from USAID-supported midwifery programs in Afghanistan, representing more than 25 percent of all midwives in the country.

To strengthen the midwifery profession, USAID provides support to the Afghan Midwives Association, the Afghan Society of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, and the National Midwifery Education Accreditation Board. All this has helped to increase the number of trained midwives from 467 under the Taliban to more than 2,500 today. As a result, use of antenatal care has risen from 26 percent in 2002 to 85 percent in 2009.

### INCREASING DEMAND FOR AND ACCESS TO QUALITY HEALTH PRODUCTS AND SERVICES THROUGH THE PRIVATE SECTOR

USAID has made significant contributions to expanding distribution of selected socially marketed, high-quality contraceptives, oral rehydration salts, and safe water solutions; disseminating public health messages; and making more products and services available to rural low-income people in a cost-effective manner. Using radio and TV spots, billboards, community health shuras, and mobile cinema, USAID educates communities across Afghanistan on the importance of birth spacing and diarrhea prevention and treatment. Mullahs and other religious leaders also deliver key health messages during Friday prayers.

To strengthen the private sector and foster best practices, USAID is supporting private hospitals, pharmacists, and pharmaceutical manufacturers in the development of professional associations.